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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the Country Area Program (CAP), a commonwealth-funded program targeted at alleviating educational isolation among government and nongovernment rural schools in New South Wales, Australia. This booklet is intended to help parents better understand the setting in which the CAP operates. The aims of the program include overcoming educational disadvantages of rural school children; developing better ways of delivering educational services; and providing a framework within which schools and communities work together to improve educational opportunities for rural students. The program emphasizes locally-developed curricula and the use of local knowledge, skills, resources, and expertise in overcoming educational isolation. This booklet also contains information about the advantages of rural schooling in the following areas: (1) the teaching-learning process; (2) pupil-teacher relationships; (3) classroom climate; (4) school-community relationships; and (5) professional development of teachers. An overview of postsecondary education is provided to assist rural students in adjusting to college life or attending training schools. For rural students this usually involves living away from home in a different environment, losing family support and contact with friends, and extra costs. Also discussed are the limited choice of jobs for girls in rural areas, the importance of rural students acquiring social skills, and family finances. (LP)

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SUPPORT FOR PARENTS OF RURAL STUDENTS

This booklet is intended to be used by schools as a handout to parents so that they better understand the setting in which the Country Areas Program operates.

Acknowledgement is made of the advice given by members of the Area Management Committee and by those who make up the Bermagui Cluster.

Special thanks goes to the South Coast Chairman, Mr Bob Murdoch, the Principals of Eden High and Bermagui Public Schools, Mr Wes Saxby and Mr Phil McGuirk, and to the Australian Council of Educational Research.

J. McFaul - Co-ordinator.

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In the late 1970's a project[1] funded by the O.E.C.D. and run by the Committee for Educational Research and Innovation turned the spotlight on rural schooling. Right across the world, in the U.S.A., Japan, Europe, Scandinavia, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand and in Australia, the same problems showed up. So did the same strengths and the same commitment to caring and striving.

According to researchers[2] the morale of teachers is sagging as they face almost impossible demands and uninformed criticism from the public. Beside teaching Maths, English and oral skills, schools are expected to turn out rural students who are tolerant, confident, creative, curious, technologically capable and positive about the work ethic. Children are supposed to be able to work in teams and be skilled leaders and decision-makers. Then there is the development of sporting skills, the importance of art and music plus capacity in communication and human caring.

The positive role of the small school[3] is now recognised and in most countries the trend to close down one teacher schools has been halted. The local school provides a community focus, an economic input and is vital to the social development of students in their earliest years.

The more we examine the situation[4] the more it becomes clear that the disadvantage resides not in the classroom, but in the community. Australia fits into the same pattern as the rest of the world and the problem is not pupil performance but educational utilisation. 7% of rural boys and 10% of rural girls participate in tertiary education programmes of one sort or another compared with almost 25% of their city cousins.

Despite shortages of resources, despite lack of professional support, despite difficulties of access to colleagues, despite having to more oe less teach themselves to teach multigrade classes, plus the problems of getting to see the latest educational products, our rural teachers are sufficiently skilled, work hard enough and generate sufficient motivation in their pupils to produce comparable results with urban schools. If we compare country students with their

city cousins, then we should extract from both groups those who are affected by factors which have nothing to do with location.

In the N.S.W. location, this means that we extract from both groups those pupils who are Aboriginals, those with ethnic backgrounds, physically and mentally handicapped students and the kids who are haunted by socio-economic problems. In primary schools country students don't perform as well as city ones, particularly in English expression, but by the end of High School there is no significant difference.

Turning to utilisation, however, the results are worrying. Country students are over-represented in the ranks of the unemployed and under-represented in Year 12. They are over-represented in dead-end jobs, in short-term employment and in jobs where the pay is low. They are under-represented in the professions, in colleges and universities and in jobs which pay well.

Look at the problems which our students face. When they finish school and wish to go away for further study or for employment, then they and their families face increased costs, the students become cut off from family support and they have to cope with the problems and the distractions of the big city. Add to this the real, and the perceived, problems of girls, particularly those who leave school at sixteen and the decline in the rural economy which results in a reduction in the number, quality and variety of jobs locally.

To help students facing these sorts of difficulties means that we want C.A.P. to help provide school programs which are sensitive to the community.

WHAT IS C.A.P.? (5)

C.A.P. is a Commonwealth Funded Program targeted directly at schools in rural Australia.

The Country Areas Program, within N.S.W., attempts to provide services, facilities and resources which may be shared among country schools: government and non-government. It facilitates at the local level, new ideas for providing those services and in so doing generally improves educational opportunities for country children.

Its aims are:

(a) to help overcome the educational disadvantages of country children associated with their restricted access to social cultural, vocational and educational activities and services;

(b) to develop better ways of delivering educational services, facilities and resources not otherwise available; and,

(c) to provide a framework within which school communities and country people work together to improve educational opportunities for country children.

The Program emphasises sharing among schools. It tries to use local knowledge, skills, resources and the expertise of the total community in overcoming educational isolation.

PROGRAM STRATEGIES

The focus of the Country Areas Program is on local areas. Parents, administrators, teachers and other people are encouraged, through local committees, to work co-operatively to improve the delivery of educational services in prescribed areas. The sharing of resources and facilities among groups of schools is encouaged.

Program funds may be used to establish and maintain support services for various kinds of schools, teachers and parents in prescribed country areas.

To meet the aims of the program, support may be provided for activities which include:

* developing curriculum programs and materials which suit the experience, interests and aptitudes of country students and which made use of local resources.

* reinforcing the positive aspects of rural life.

* building students' self-confidence and improving their attitudes to learning through community programs designed to enrich the cultural, social and recreational life of country areas.

* providing curriculum enrichment and teacher and learner support through the provision of itinerant teaching services.

* providing access and opportunities to participate in contemporary arts activities such as dance, drama, music, theatre and visual arts, including film, television and media.

* making imaginative use of local people and local industries in school programs.

* broadening students' understanding of potential occupational horizons.

* finding new ways of overcoming isolation and extending curriculum offerings through sharing resources and facilities, such as radio and television.

SUCCESSES OF THE PROGRAM

* locally developed curriculum materials (reading, social science, environmental, in video and print) which have direct relevance to students' experiences and build on the strengths of the local community and the area;

* opportunities for students studying by correspondence to participate in art, craft, music and sporting activities through camps and/or itinerant supervising teachers;

* shared resources through a mobile resource van or resource centres in isolated clusters of schools:

* widening students' understanding of potential occupational opportunities through city-work experience/city-living programs and/or career awareness excursions;

* enriched cultural, social and recreational life through music, drama, craft, community newspapers, sporting programs, involving itinerant teachers, camps, community expertise. Some of these programs have become self-supporting;

* reduction in the professional isolation of teachers (because of itinerant teacher visits and sharing of resources and expertise among schools) and increased skills and morale.

Much of the success of the Program is dependent on:

* the way in which identified community needs are met;

* enthusiastic project administrators/co-ordinators;

* good planning;

* the quality of personnel employed;

* co-operation - across government and non-government school sectors and among schools and their communities. This has the overall effect of strengthening rural education and is vital to program success.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SCHOOLING[6]

INTRODUCTION:

(a) Perceived advantages of rural schooling fall into five categories, having to do with:

1. teaching-learning processes
2. pupil-teacher relationships
3. classroom climate
4. school-community relationships
5. professional development of teachers
6. teacher-pupil ratios (particularly secondary)

(b) Murray Lake's caveat should be noted - many of the areas discussed have potential for advantage only if recognised and exploited by teachers and school administrators.

1. Teaching-Learning Processes

A favourable climate exists for theintroduction and development of different approaches to teaching and learning -

- there is a need for, and thus an opportunity for students to practise, independent and autonomous learning.
- there is likely to be greater participation of individual students in learning situations.
- multigrade teaching or individualised programmes are often required
- practices such as peer tutoring, using the local environment or local community people as resources are integrated naturally into the learning programme.
- distance from Regional Office and shortage of support systems and directives has often produced teachers who are outstanding in classroom practice, sympathetic in nature and well versed in using methods that succeed in gaining the warm approval of their school community.

2. Pupil-Teacher Relationships

- Senior secondary pupils are very active in this relationship and offer, as well as receive, support in times of crisis.
- pupils and teachers often know and understand the other's family background, any circumstances related to school success, etc.
- teachers in smaller communities are more visible, present to students as whole persons, more likely to be involved with students and parents in non-school activities.
- students may work with the same teacher across different curriculum areas or over a period of some years.

3. Classroom Climate

The following are often characteristic of smaller rural schools -

- mutual respect
- small class sizes
- personalised, family-type atmosphere
- fewer interpersonal problems (less teacher and class time devoted to "discipline" or "control")
- a tradition of co-operative learning
- an opportunity to integrate naturally children with physical handicaps or learning difficulties.

4. School-Community Relationships

In smaller rural communities schools have the opportunity to -

- provide valued physical resources, e.g. library, assembly area, sports fields, meeting place, personal skills and experiences.

4. School-Community Relationships cont'd.

- develop programmes which link directly to the major social, cultural and economic emphases of the community.
- focus feelings of community identity and pride and provide stability in the community
- win strong support for community/school programmes (e.g. work experience) or for innovative learning programmes.

5. Professional Development of Teachers

Because smaller schools of necessity impose a wider range of roles and duties on teachers, such schools can -

- give teachers greater responsibility, increase their opportunities to see wider applications of curriculum, the developmental needs of children at a range of ages,, etc.
- encourage teachers to develop co-operative relationships with other teachers, other schools, community members
- promote teachers' understanding of the role of the school and its position in the system, in the community.
- facilitate the spread of innovative or creative ideas for meeting particular problems or situations.
- provide leadership opportunities in areas other than their own profession, and to bring this back into the school.
- develop skills in specific areas not necessarily part of schoolroom practice on an every day basis.
- small communities and the consequent acquiring of knowledge about individuals, leads to a chance for deeper understanding of other peoples' motives and reactions.

(7)

TRANSITION

When a rural student moves through school there are three periods of transition and the first one is from a primary school serving a single community to a high school drawing pupils from several different localities. Parents can expect to find their high school much larger, much more formal and divided into separate systems of responsibility. Parents should take time to understand how the school works so as to continue to give their child the support they have provided all through primary school.

Country students divide into two groups when they move into senior school (Year 11). One group is made up of the kids who are at school because they cannot leave until they get a job. Further study gives them time to grow up, a chance to do some practical subjects and the advantage of looking for work without being idle or becoming depressed. The vital change for rural students who intend to do Year 12 is to become involved in their own education. They cannot just wait for the teachers to do it all for them. As one senior girl told a Year 11 seminar, "If you want good marks you have to go after them. You have to get involved - it is to your advantage. So, who has got the marks you need? It's the teachers! And you have to go after them. Think of your teachers as rabbits and yourself as a hunter. Of course it is not going to be easy. Rabbits hide in the dark down rabbit burrows, don't they? Whatever you want is all the better if you have to try hard to get it. In senior school what you end with is partly up to you."

INTRODUCTION TO TERTIARY STUDY FOR RURAL PUPILS (8)

Country students who have to live away from home, losing family support and contact with their friends, need help with the changeover to tertiary study. They face the problems of extra costs and those of living on their own in a different environment.

These notes were written by Jack McFaul and are based on research articles on University and College Determinants, supplied through the good graces of N.S.W. Education Commission, experiences of country students compiled by the Centre for Community Education in N.W. Tasmania, an analysis of teacher support in the classroom and the views of past and present tertiary students.

Narooma High School uses this material as a handout to Year 12 students in conjunction with discussions, visits and formal type information.

* * * * *

As you complete high school and go on to college or university there are some changes and a few problems. Most country students must live away from home, thus losing contact with their friends and the support of their families. You must cope with the hassles of costs and learn how to succeed in tertiary study. Research work done at colleges and universities identifies three reasons for tertiary students not continuing.

First is your secondary school performance.

Secondly, your early experiences in tertiary study - you do need to enjoy college or university life.

Third, course satisfaction - you must like what you are studying.

Country children who have gone through this experience say that you must adapt to the difference between high school teaching and tertiary study. It can be a help to reside on campus. It is not as lonely and provides some assistance with courses. You have to accept responsibility for yourself, no one else will, and develop self discipline.

At least one in ten students have serious problems in first year because:

(i) they don't work hard enough - a minimum of forty hours per week, every week, is needed including the time spent in lectures.

(ii) they are distracted - by friends, sport, entertainment, social outings, drugs etc. or by shortage of money.

(iii) they don't adjust - to freedom, to self discipline, to loneliness or to learning from verbal teaching and tutorials.

The more supportive, or directive, your high school is, the bigger change you will find in college or university. Most school teachers support their pupils by controlling the action in the classroom. The teacher decides the topic, asks the questions and modifies or corrects the answers. Each second turn in speaking belongs to the teacher. Pupil participation in the classroom happens often but always at the request of the teacher. Teachers also advise their pupils, remind them of their obligations, encourage and reward effort and generally base marks for the year upon the final examination.

In tertiary institutions the case is quite different.

Taking notes in lectures

This is not an easy skill to learn, particularly as it is essential that you pick it up quickly. A little time spent at the end of your holidays (before you go off to University or college) doing speed writing will help. Even better is getting in some practice while you are at school. Try to take good notes while your teacher is talking. Be warned though, lecturers are much harder to take notes from than teachers, because they have to cover so much information in a very short time. You should aim to write four or more pages of foolscap within a 50 minute period, whilst understanding the lecture.

If you have a break before your next lecture, or if you manage to arrive a few minutes early, go over what you have written. Make sure

your notes are understandable, fill in words or points you did not have time to add in the lecture.

The best time to do this is immediately after the lecture. If this is impossible, be sure to do it when your lectures are over that night. Also, when you have time, think over what the lecturer said. Did you agree with it? Was there anything you did not understand? Did the lecturer touch on anything which you would like to explore? These are the sort of questions which you should take along to your tutorials. Generally, there is not a great deal of opportunity for asking questions in lectures (though, for goodness sake, do not hesitate to ask a question if you have one; everyone around you is probably wondering the same thing and will be highly grateful to you for raising the issue).

Tutorials

Whereas a lecturer may talk to up to a thousand students a lecture, tutorials rarely contain more than 25 students. As a result, tutorials are fairly informal. The emphasis is on discussion, with the students helping each other rather than being spoon fed by their tutor. You will get to know your tutor and the people in your tutorials quite well and it is a good place to make friends. A few brief remarks exchanged with your neighbour in lectures can make University and College less lonely too.

Tutorials are compulsory, so make sure you go to them, or you may fail the course requirements. But even if you think you have failed them, don't panic. Go back to your old tutorial and start attending regularly and they will forgive you; if you think your case is really desperate, go and talk to your tutor. All they ask usually is that you try to attend most tutorials in future. They are usually very nice to you. If, for some reason you find it too unbearably humiliating to go back to your old tutorial group, swap to another one.

Lectures

Usually your lecturer will indicate to you the reading he/she wants you to do before each lecture. Please make sure you do it, otherwise

the lecture will be harder to follow, you will not make good notes and most importantly, the course will not be nearly as interesting. And if you lose interest in your course, you are on your way to failing it. If any part of your course is uninteresting, put some extra work into it. This will usually make you more interested in it. If you miss a lecture, try to borrow someone else's notes on it. Remember, however, that this is not as good as being at the lecture yourself. Notes are never as good as the original lecture and also you do not learn the material as well if you do not hear it. Finally, remember that all your marks count. It is much harder to try and get a distinction at the end of the year because you were lazy earlier and got a pass where you should have got a credit, than it is to maintain a steady standard of, say, credits throughout the year.

PROBLEMS FOR GIRLS(9)

In most country areas there are special problems for our girls. When one of our girls leaves school at the end of Year 10 most parents are reluctant to let her leave home to get a job although this can happen for a boy. There is a limited choice of jobs for girls in country towns, both in variety and quality. Most of us look for models as we grow up and there are less of them in rural areas for girls to be inspired by because our country towns tend to have been dominated by males. Here are the fitures for apprenticeships in N.S.W. last year -

Boys - 13,684 accepted

Girls- 1,836 accepted but 1500 of these were for hairdressing.

SOCIAL SKILLS(10)

When our country children leave home to pursue a particular job, become an apprentice, do a tech. course, attend a C.A.E. or try for a degree at University, they need social strengths. By going away they are cut off from family support, lose touch with their friends and have to cope with the problems and distractions of living on their own in a different environment. The social demands on country school leavers are much greater than upon the average school leaver, but it is a feature of country living that our children tend to be socially underdeveloped.

Although social competence is a complex matter, the mechanics of social skills revolve around the capacity to speak for yourself. Schools can help rural students by teaching them oracy. Parents who expect that their children will want to live elsewhere can help very much. Visits to other places, information sharing and encouragement are part of our job as parents.

FINANCE[11]

Rural students will not take schooling seriously unless they know that their families can pay for the consequences or that they can manage on available finance. The consequences for rural families, or the difficulties for country students, are much more costly than they are for the average family - about $6000 per annum for a student at a university - but rural families do not have larger amounts of disposable income and we do not always train our own children in money management. Open family discussions can help to strengthem our students' motivation, attitudes and expectations.

(1) Preface to "In Pursuit of Excellence" - Darnell & Simpson.

(2) "Skilling the Australian Community", Melbourne University.

(3) Education & Local Development - Sloessiger

(4) Parents & Community - N.S.W. State Conference on C.A.P. (1984)

(5) Chairman of South Coast Regional C.A.P. (1988)

(6) National Workshop on "Schooling in Rural Australia" (1987)

(7) Spera 2nd National Conference on Rural Education - Bendigo(1986)

(8) Introduction to Tertiary Study for Rural Pupils (1985)

(9) N.S.W. Conference on C.A.P. (Workshop) 1987

(10) Educating Rural Pupils - N.S.W. P & C Journal, April 1988.

(11) Costing of Tertiary Study - Centre for Community Education in North West Tasmania.